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## World Telecommunication Day 1996 (WTD 1996) *Telecommunication and Sport*

### ***Message from ITU Secretary-General, Pekka Tarjanne***

This year, as the world prepares for the 26th Olympic Games in Atlanta, the International Olympic Committee will celebrate 100 years of modern Olympism. With this in mind, the ITU has chosen to celebrate this year's World Telecommunication Day under the theme of ***Telecommunication and Sport***. In the Centenary year of the Olympics it is timely to reflect on the changes modern communications have brought to the way the world participates in this truly global sporting event, which symbolizes for people everywhere the crowning achievement of physical accomplishment and international fellowship.

From their re-inception in 1896, the Olympic Games have generated enormous popular interest. And from these earliest days, telecommunication and broadcast technologies have been used to bring the event to people across the globe. The first modern Games in Athens, 100 years ago, were covered by reporters who transmitted stories and results back to their newspapers via the international telegraph system. This first international telecommunications network was also the first achievement of the ITU, which had been established some thirty years earlier to co-ordinate and promote the interconnectivity of the telegraph across national borders.

With the invention and popularization of radiocommunications technology around the turn of the century, the Games took on a new dimension. The first live radio broadcasts were sent from the Chamonix winter Olympics in 1924, and met with great success. For the public, radio was able to capture the excitement of 'being there' in a way that could not be matched by the printed page. In the decades that followed, millions of people the world over huddled around wireless sets, listening eagerly as on-site broadcasters described the Olympic events as they unfolded.

The Tokyo Games in 1964 marked the advent of the first television coverage. Often spectacularly visual, and with a guaranteed worldwide appeal, the Olympic Games might almost have been tailor-made for the medium of television. Today, the Olympics represent the single biggest television spectacle in the world. This year's Atlanta Games will attract more than 16,000 journalists, 11,000 of them from television and radio stations which will generate more than 3,000 hours of live coverage. Footage of the Games will be dispersed to every corner of the globe, with an audience of several billion expected to be watching at any given time during the 16-day event.

Throughout the history of the Olympiad the ITU has played a crucial behind-the-scenes role in bringing the thrill and excitement of the Games to the public. From its early role administering the worldwide interconnection of telegraph systems, the ITU was a key player in the development and propagation of the radio and television broadcasting technologies which carried news and pictures of the winners and losers to people in distant lands.

The rapid pace of technological development in recent years has kept the ITU very busy. The state-of-the-art systems which will be used to cover this year's Games, such as live-to-air global satellite transmission, digital photo transmission systems, high-speed ISDN lines, new global mobile telephony and fax systems, and high-speed global computer networks, have all been developed with the assistance of the ITU, which plays, today, a more important role than ever in the evolution of new globally-interconnected communication systems.

The continuing growth of telecommunications networks throughout the world means that more people than ever can share the excitement of sporting events like the Olympics. In overcoming the obstacles to communication, both via new technologies which make it possible to reach remote areas once inaccessible because of distance or geography, and via development projects which bring telecommunications services to people in the world's developing regions, the ITU continues to helping to promote the flow of information between the world's inhabitants.

Sport and telecommunication have one very important feature in common. They both foster greater communication between the people of the world, breaking down the barriers of race, culture and geographical distance.

The goal of the Olympic movement is to contribute to the building of a peaceful and better world by sport practiced without discrimination, and with mutual understanding, friendship and fair play. The ITU's avowed mission is to foster an environment of global co-operation to promote communications development, so that all the world's people can gain access to communications technology in an equitable way.

Let us hope that these aims, which are very close in both vision and spirit, will be realized as we head into the next millennium. We stand today at the dawn of a new age of global interconnection, when communication and understanding on a global level have perhaps never been more important.